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NEGOTIATING THE CITY

WOMEN IN URBAN SPACES IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Women have conditional access to public spaces in Pakistan. This access is limited for sociocultural, religious, and political reasons that manifest in the built environment: in architectural elements as well as in urban spatial design. The discussion is focused on Pakistani cities of Islamabad and Lahore, as they offer two very diverse urban settings within the country; uncovering and addressing the reasons why women are absent from urban spaces.

The research takes into account four different angles: The first includes the analysis of up to date gender, spatial, and urban studies to deconstruct space and gender. The second deals with the traditional, pre-colonial architecture; reflecting on influences on urban configurations and the related improvements for women's access to the public. The third discovers female owned businesses and entrepreneurs, who have, consciously or unconsciously, provided greater urban access and opportunities for Pakistani women. The fourth looks into local feminist initiatives such as Girls at Dhabas that employ the city as a backdrop to appropriate urban space by engaging in transgressive acts of reclamation.

The employed methodology is a combination of theoretical and historical analysis with an empirical approach, based on conducted interviews with local experts. Simultaneously, surveys have been conducted with local women of different socio-economic classes as to understand their personal limitations. Based on the fact that Pakistani urban spaces are highly gendered and dominated by men, the following questions arise: **What are the reasons women's access to public space in Pakistan is conditional and problematic? What are the possibilities of un-gendering spatial access through urban design?**

The thesis engages with public/private dichotomies and studies precolonial architecture, understanding the impact of colonialism on women's access. The architectural and urban spatial responses that help women gain more access are identified, and it is deliberated how they would react with the contemporary urban setting. It is determined that contemporary city configurations impact women's engagement with one another, and therefore, urban space.

Keywords:

urban space, gender, feminism, colonialism, traditional architecture, Islamic architecture, Pakistan.